

- Report No. 73
- July-August 1987

Women's Concerns

Report



REPRINT

Widowhood

A married woman can expect widowhood. She can expect to spend as much time being a widow as she does raising her family. For every 100 women who are married to men five years older than themselves, 64 can expect to be widowed for the first time before they are age 55. In time, four of every five women will be widowed.

We need not only learn how to deal with our own possible widowhood but also how to relate to widowed women in our midst, who frequently describe their situation in such terms as: "There are no words to tell you how sad and helpless I felt" and "I seemed to be flopping around like a leaf in the wind, not finding consolation."

For my doctoral research, I gathered stories from approximately 80 widowed women of all faith backgrounds and learned this paradox: While widows find comfort in their faith, they feel the church is not attuned to their needs and often responds poorly.

Many women found that in their grief, their faith became more personal. They discovered the God who is a refuge and a source of strength. At the same time, some women questioned their religious values because they felt angry with God over their husband's death. Then they felt guilty: if they were truly devout they wouldn't have such feelings. To acknowledge such feelings would be to deny their faith in God.

Church people sometimes equate doubts about faith with falling away from the faith and when widows perceive this attitude, they are reluctant to share with others for fear of judgment. This is not the only way in which church people have difficulty relating to widows, I discovered.

Widows told me they did not appreciate glib clichés such as, "Time will take away the hurt." Similarly, friends who quoted comforting scriptures were appreciated only when they had suffered a similar loss. One widow said the best consolation came from those who let her cry. They said that church people were attentive about the husband's death for about six weeks and then seemed to forget about it.

Widows also told me they felt excluded or isolated at church functions. Said one, "I've not been asked my opinion on anything since my husband died (and was frequently asked before). Now, I'm only asked for money."

The most helpful people were friends who invited the widow out socially and willing listeners who talked about the dead husband and let the widow do the same. A touch or a hug was appreciated because the physical contact was something they missed from their husbands.

Although the first year or two were difficult periods of questioning and adjustment, I found that most women were really quite resilient and were able to go on to lead productive lives, often with new perspectives and new priorities. Widowhood often forced them to get in touch with who they really were. As one woman said, "I realized I couldn't get to heaven on my husband's shirttails." Many other women, especially those of the older generation, came to understand just how influenced they had been by their husbands and to what extent they had relinquished decision-making to them.

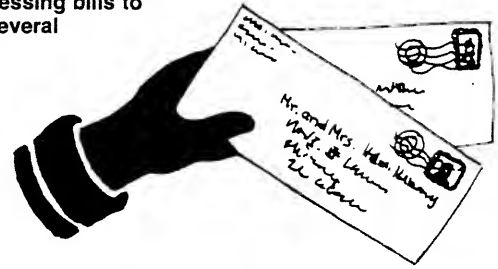
Although women miss their spouses, they do make it and they do get on with their lives. In the long run, we can take comfort in the words of Ecclesiastes 3:4. There is a time to mourn but it does not last forever; as widows, we will also experience times to laugh and times to dance.

For this issue of *Report*, I have asked Mennonite and Brethren in Christ women to share their stories of widowhood. I have also included the story of one Third World woman, written by an MCCer in Bangladesh. In reading these narratives, I hope we will be better prepared to stand by our sisters during their time of grief and beyond.

—Irene Loewen

Irene Loewen, a member of the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns, teaches pastoral counseling at the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno, Calif. A licensed clinical psychologist, Irene has a private practice and also presents programs on widowhood and stress management to church groups. She and her husband, Howard, are the parents of two teen-age daughters. Irene is personally involved in this issue as her own father died when she was 15 and Irene has witnessed her mother's struggles and growth.

"My world was slow to acknowledge my husband's death. The doctor's clinic insisted on addressing bills to him even after several instructions."



The MCC Committee on Women's Concerns *REPORT USPS 367-790* is published bimonthly jointly by Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Peace Section, 21 South 12th Street, Akron, PA 17501 and by MCC Canada Peace and Social Concerns, 134 Plaza Drive, Winnipeg, MB R3T 5K9. Second-class postage paid at Akron, PA.

by Miriam Lehman Weaver

Widowhood: What is it like?

I am a widow. The underlying hard fact is that it never goes away. It's not that I think about it every minute of every day, but it is always there in the background and sometimes in the foreground when events or circumstances make it painfully evident.

The responsibility day and night for my young family—ages 3, almost 2, and 9 weeks old at that time—seemed to descend upon my shoulders like a heavy weight and stayed a long, long time. I was very sensitive about my children's misbehavior. When they were fussy in church or impolite in front of guests I wondered if I should discipline them or not. They were so dear. I was afraid if I loved them too much, God might take them away from me, too.

On a personal level, I did not know how I wanted to be addressed. This sounds like a small thing now, but in 1950 a woman usually relied upon her husband's name for her own identity. I felt I could no longer call myself Mrs. Melvin Weaver, but when all other women in a group introduced themselves as Mrs. plus husband's name, I felt cheated out of the recognition a married woman enjoys.

In addition, financial realities came early and stayed late. There was no insurance or savings cushion. The year I was earning \$120 a month, it all went for living expenses. I nearly panicked when a \$700 bill came unexpectedly. The following year a \$2,200 teaching salary looked better, but divided up among 12 months and placed beside the needs of a growing family it seemed to shrink.

In time, the financial picture improved, but the loneliness just wouldn't go away. I had many friends—good ones—but this loneliness ate away at my heart like a sickness. When I saw married couples holding hands, smiling at one another or walking together, I felt a deep sadness. After the immediate throes of shock and adjustment, I became aware of a new realization, submerged for a time, of how much I missed the sexual union of marriage. This was painful both physically and emotionally. I felt I was too young to give up the pleasures

of marriage. This feeling of missing out on the fun, the security, the doing-things-together and the comfort of belonging to my loving husband was hard to bear. Some men found it hard to consider me as a friend anymore, even on a casual basis. I moved in a feminine world those first years because men seemed to be afraid to talk to me. This fear did nothing for my feelings of personhood.

Four years later I came close to an emotional breakdown. It was an inward thing; no one knew about it. But I longed for counseling even though I felt ashamed to admit that I was having problems. My need for support seemed to be a bad reflection on the validity of my Christian experience, so I tried to work through the problems alone.

I had no ready response to all the people who told me I should be glad I had all girls and no boys. We had some rough times during the girls' teen years. Emotional problems surfaced for them which, I was told, had their roots in early childhood when they experienced the sudden, traumatic loss of their father in the plane crash. They had never really understood the impact of such a loss.

Eventually we worked through these problems, and I learned to handle family ups-and-downs with more composure. I was thankful for my church and the way they ministered to our family needs. Sometimes I felt that the church at large did not understand widows' special, ongoing needs for affirmation of themselves as equals in church life. Although my husband and I had been in mission service in Kentucky, no one asked for my advice or ideas in these aspects of church life.

I got a teaching job which provided a livelihood for us and a feeling of security for me. My school vacations for the most part coincided with the girls' vacations so we could be home together during Christmas and most summer vacations. I was never quite happy about their having to come home to an empty house and be there an hour or two before I got home, but that couldn't be helped. I was so thankful for my daughters—problems and all. They added immeasurably to my recovery from sorrow.

One summer all three of them left the home area within a two-week period: One left for an MCC overseas assignment, another returned to college and the third went to Marburg, Germany for a year of study. This time I was really alone. But as I drove the 200 miles home after seeing the last one off, I experienced God's presence in a very

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significant way. I had expected to feel very sad and alone, but God's grace came through. Better years were ahead with more personal freedom and time for new experiences.

Many opportunities opened up for growth and service. I spent sabbaticals on a large university campus and at the MCC U.S. Peace Section office in Washington, D.C. I became a board member of Mennonite Mutual Aid. At that first meeting, after finding my way through the big O'Hare terminal, I had to pinch myself: Could this really be the same person of 25 years before? With two of my daughters, I toured Europe on a Eurail pass. I visited my married daughter in Botswana and toured Cape Town and the southern tip of that great continent. Later, I went to Mennonite World Conference in France and did a study tour of China.

My parents, siblings, in-laws and daughters have been a steady source of strength. My three daughters have supported me on "all my leaning sides." Of course this support has been coupled with much frank and pointed advice which has helped me keep my balance. They made me aware that while I am surely not the perfect person or mother, they love and appreciate me anyway.

Through all these years Christ has given a focus to my life, and the Holy Spirit has stood by with comfort and guidance. I am thankful for prayer groups and a widow support group in which we share mutual concerns, have potluck dinners and go places together. Being in a small group would have been a great help to me 37 years ago. ■

Miriam L. Weaver had been married almost five years when her husband was killed 37 years ago. A resident of Harrisonburg, Va., Miriam taught at Eastern Mennonite High School and Eastern Mennonite College for 27 years.

by Muriel Thiessen Stackley

New Silences

My world was slow to acknowledge my husband's death. The doctor's clinic insisted on addressing bills to him even after several instructions. I thought of some sarcastic responses, but didn't have the energy or inclination to deliver them. The loan agency which holds the house mortgage is fully informed, but still carries only my deceased husband's social security number on the account. I will talk to them again next week.

I dislike the word "widow." (I earn my living dealing with print and always jerk when I have to refer to the partial line of type at the top of a column; the trade name is "widow.") I'd rather think of myself as "single."

The first unilateral decision I made (only days after my husband's death) and then followed through on was important for my self-esteem. I decided to buy and install a new latch for the ailing storm door. Several adjustments and fetching-of-tools and re-reading-the-instructions later, it was on and working and still is! I had been close to despair a number of times in the process, and then proportionately exuberant upon completion. *I would be able to manage!*

I am learning some new spiritual disciplines. In years past with four people clamoring (my perception) for attention, personal worship was haphazard and hardly ever silent. I am liking the new silences in my life. I'm realizing the importance of ritual. Ritual carries one along when unsureness tries to take over.

I am newly in touch with the Creator's universe. I keep track of the planets. I go outside at dawn. I am invited to new awareness. The person to whom I was married is "a friend out there." I feel the limitations of one's body, but feel at home in my body. I don't mind being confined to it and am determined "to praise Thee as long as Thou lendest me breath." ■

Muriel Thiessen Stackley lives in Newton, Kan. where she edits the General Conference magazine, *The Mennonite*. She has been widowed for two years, following a marriage of 21 years.

"Cancer always happens to someone else—not to us. At first we had difficulty just saying the word 'cancer.'"



"It took me about two years until I could say, 'We know that all things work together for good, to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.'"

by Ruth E. Wall

To Walk Alone

"Be still and know that I am God."

This is the verse that the Lord gave me right after my husband's serious surgery in 1977.

Almost nine years have gone by since the passing of my dear husband. After a close marriage of almost 33 years, I found that learning to walk alone again was not easy. I felt like withdrawing, but I knew my husband wouldn't have wanted me to do that, and God would not want me to either. I had to go on living. I have often thanked God for tears.

After examining my husband, a specialist in Salem, Oregon, told us, "I think I feel a mass." Cancer always happens to someone else—not to us. At first we had difficulty just saying the word "cancer." But gradually we found that we could talk about his illness openly to one another and to our friends. We struggled with this the remaining 11 months we had together. The doctors had given us great hope of having many more years together—but the cancer wasn't diagnosed soon enough. We went through all the chemotherapy and radiation treatments, but the cancer cells went into his spine and hit his central nervous system. He was admitted to the hospital seven times during those 11 difficult months. To lose one you love so deeply, ounce by ounce, is not easy. We became even closer during this time and had a chance to say "I love you" a thousand times.

After much heart searching, we called the elders in the church and prayed for healing. God used this experience to give healing to our spirits. God did not see fit to heal on this earth, but chose to give him complete healing.

After my husband died, my sister and I drove home from the hospital. I sat in his favorite chair and cried and said, "Now I am a widow."

I didn't have a pastor to call because our church at that time was without a pastor. So I made many telephone calls and made all the funeral arrangements. I believe that this made my grief more difficult.

Our friends stood by us during his illness and for a short time after. I struggled by myself for many months. My children lived in other states; therefore, I had no pastor and no children to talk to. I learned to lean on God completely and reach out to others who are hurting.

During my first year alone, I experienced many spiritual struggles. Why didn't God answer our prayers and heal my husband on this earth? I had so many unanswered questions. A devotional I read during the first few months helped me many times. It said that God is up in heaven, looking down on the beautiful pattern he is weaving. I am on this earth, looking up at the bottom of the tapestry, and all I can see are the loose ends.

It took me about two years until I could say, "We know that all things work together for good, to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." I finally was able to tell God, "Lord, again I can believe that you wouldn't have hurt me like this unless something good would come out of it."

I began realizing that being alone is a whole new life—I had to reach out and make new friends. I had a real burden and love for others who were hurting. The Lord brought into my life three women whose husbands were dying of cancer. I was able to minister to them during the difficult days before the passing of their husbands and during their time of grief. On one occasion my brother told me, "You are going to have to quit trying to help others who are hurting." My answer was, "When I can help others, it makes me stronger."

I lived by myself for seven years after my husband's death and was finally able to sell my home and make a move to be close to my son and family. I wanted to move away from "memories" and move to a new area where I would be able to be a "person" and not "half of a couple" that didn't exist anymore. I felt the need to establish my own identity and make new acquaintances.

I have learned during these past years that "God has not comforted me to make me comfortable, but to make me a comforter." ■

Ruth E. Wall lives in Fresno, Calif. and attends Butler Mennonite Brethren Church.

"Often these women are forced to beg, carrying a basket from house to house to hold the rice they are given."



MCC began its work in Bangladesh in 1971, when its war for independence from Pakistan had just ended. Meeting the needs of widows—the war had created many—and women in that society has been integral to MCC's work there ever since.

by Caroline Stetter

Salima

The women of Bangladesh are raised as dependents; they learn to fear independence. As children they are dependent on their father or male guardian for support, and later these men provide them with a husband who will take over the supporting role. A woman will marry at puberty or shortly thereafter. Her husband is usually five to 15 years her senior. She will bear children—at least one must be a son who will support her if her husband dies. Young widows in their teens and early 20s easily remarry, but it is more difficult for those who are 30 or 40 years old. If there are no adult sons to support her, she must provide for herself and her dependent children.

Often these women are forced to beg, carrying a basket from house to house to hold the rice they are given. In a married couple's home, there is always room for the husband's mother if she becomes a widow, but there is seldom room for the wife's widowed mother. A widow with sons can look forward to an old age of relative security and comfort, playing with grandchildren and seeing them grow. Widows who bore only daughters are left to beg.

Daily it becomes clearer that Bangladeshi society has many similarities to the society of biblical times. I am reminded of the Bible verse which says, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: To look after orphans and widows in their distress..." (James 1:27)

Salima is a widow I have come to know here. She lives in a small town in southern Bangladesh. She grew up in a typically poor family, attending school sporadically through grade three; as a result, she cannot actually read or write. When she was about 15 years old, Salima married a man who was about 10 years her senior. Salima was frightened because she had never seen the man she was to marry until the wedding day. She had to leave her home

to live with her husband and his family. Initially she stayed a couple days at a time but eventually she settled into her new home. After a year, their first child, a son, was born.

While her husband worked as a manager of a fertilizer warehouse, Salima was involved with household chores and child care, which soon included three more daughters. About 10 years after they had been married, her husband died suddenly of a heart attack. During the first few months of her grief, her husband's family and neighbors were very helpful, providing money and food.

Salima worried about what she would do, where she would go, and how she would take care of her children. She began working for her neighbors, cooking, cleaning or doing whatever was demanded of her. In return for this labor, she was given rice. This kind of work was irregular, averaging one or two days a week. When she was not working for neighbors, Salima would buy large quantities of unhusked rice and process it by boiling it. Later she would sell this rice. She was able to invest in such activity with loans and help from her husband's family and her neighbors. Unfortunately it was not always profitable since the market is unreliable.

This was the pattern of her life for nearly eight years. Salima now has a stable job, cleaning house and doing laundry for some wealthy people in the community. This keeps her busy six days a week. She hopes that in her old age her children will take care of her, providing her with food, clothing and care. She hopes her son will be able to find work as a guard, or that he might sell goods from a small stand in the bazaar. He chose to discontinue school after two years and now helps out by planting vegetables on government-owned land by the side of the road. These vegetables are used to supplement the family's diet.

Living in the small room where Salima and her husband began their life together, the five of them do fine. The children are now 16, 14, 12 and 10. Salima finds joy in her children when she looks at them. When they do well in school, she is pleased. Yet she often worries about how she will continue to clothe them and pay for their schooling.

In two years it will be time for her oldest daughter's wedding. Salima is starting to prepare for this by putting money aside for the dowry. The process of finding a husband will take about one month. Discussions with the parents of the young man will take place, and negotiations will be made. These will include how much gold jewelry the groom's family wants the bride to bring into the marriage, and what other types of gifts the groom's family



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would like: a wrist watch, other jewelry or even household appliances. They will also discuss how many people they will expect to feed on the wedding day.

In the choice of the young man, Salima will be advised by her male relatives and neighbors. They will find out what kind of a young man he is, what kind of home he comes from, and how he plans to support his new bride in the future. Salima wants a better life for her daughter than what she had, since her husband was quite poor. He had restricted her travel to town arguing that she had no reason to go since he would purchase all she needed.

Salima never discusses marriage prospects with her daughter, saying such discussion is not good. She is changing things just a bit from when her marriage was arranged. She will wait until her daughter finishes a certain grade in school before arrangements begin. This increases the bride's age at marriage by a year or two.

Salima will not remarry for fear that the new husband would not look after her children with the same care as he would for her.

Like other Muslims, Salima prays five times a day. She often talks with God about where she will go and what she will do. God gives her strength and peace. She says God gave her a husband, and God has taken him away. She is pleased with God. There is no profit in being angry with him. ■

Caroline Stetter is women's program leader for MCC in Bangladesh. Based in Feni, she oversees the women's components of the rural savings and the homesite programs. Caroline is from Morgantown, W.Va.

Frieda Freyenberger has been a widow for 32 years. Her husband, Edwin, was accidentally electrocuted while working around the home in 1955. They lived on a 120-acre farm. She had eight children and was four months pregnant when he died at the age of 42. They had no insurance or social security. But they had many Christian friends who helped, especially with hand-me-downs. Frieda recalls, "The girls still laugh about how happy they were the day we got a 'Kathy box.' She was their first cousin who always gave some of her nicest clothes."

One of Frieda's daughters writes, "She lost her lover, father to her children, friend, provider, and yes, her husband at a time when it must have seemed impossible for her to carry on alone. But she did it with bushels of patience, love, and faith." Frieda wrote this letter 20 years ago when one daughter needed information for a speech.

by Frieda Freyenberger

Dear Daughter,

Your daddy was very special to me—we loved each other, so naturally he was missed through the years after his death. It really didn't hit me at the time of his being electrocuted—Uncle Glen (M.D.) was there and gave me pills. He kept me supplied till after the funeral. Aunt Esther stayed with us for a week. Then we were alone and felt what had happened.

The boys would come in after doing the chores, supper was ready but one was missing—seemed like we just had to wait for your daddy to come join us. I never let on, but mealtime, evenings and bedtime were some of my hardest times. That is when tears would flow.

Looking back I know I didn't always show love when I disciplined you. Also I didn't show enough faith in your judgments. I know there were times I was wrong and you right—we just have to forgive each other for those times.

At times it was almost more than I could do to be father and mother, especially when a schoolteacher told me, "Your boy needs a father." That hurt. It wasn't my wish that your father died.

I have many good memories of your father. He had high principles, which are with me today. He was kind, loving and thoughtful. He also was a good provider. We didn't



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"As I named the pallbearers I found myself thinking, 'I'd better check this with Neil.' And then the stark reality hit me: It was my decision."

have all the modern conveniences we have today. Some of you remember the cold trips to the outhouse and no refrigerator. We had electricity which was nice to wash clothes. The water was heated in the washhouse. In winter time your daddy stayed with you (sometimes he did the washing) while I had to be out. Then we had to hang the things on the line outside. What cold fingers we got! We had a wood and coal furnace. Daddy would bank the fire. We didn't know how to do that, so after he died the house was cold. Often Gerald got up and made a fire before going out to do chores. When we closed the kitchen door, the wood cookstove gave nice heat for you younger ones to dress.

The babies had kept coming. It wasn't always so convenient, but how thankful I am now that we didn't stop with one or two! I feel the Lord knew I'd be needing each one of you. You children kept me busy and on my toes.

We took several vacations, but never all together. Looking back I would do some things differently: I would have packed you up and ridden along to town or wherever your daddy had to go. But then it was easier to stay home, so I did a lot of the time.

When Deana was born five months after your daddy's death, she was the pride and joy for all of us. To have a healthy baby girl was an answer to prayer. I didn't think more of her than any of you, but I guess having her with no father around made her more special. We all claimed her as a wonderful baby. She has been special to all of us through the years. The year Deana started school, I went to work a few days a week. The days were so long alone at home, I just had to get out.

I appreciate each one of you more as the years go by. I'm glad I took you to church and that we had time with the Lord each day as a family. I'm also glad that each one of you made the decision to accept Christ into your heart. My hope and prayer is that you will give God first place in your home, with your family and that you will trust God for all your needs. I could never have made it on my own strength, but through Christ all things are possible.

—Mother ■

Frieda Freyenberger was married for 20 years and has been widowed for 32 years. She attends Sugar Creek Mennonite Church in Wayland, Iowa. At the time of Edwin's death, her eldest son, Gerald, was a high school senior; Wayne and Elizabeth were in high school; Anna, Kay, Ledru and Stan were in grade school; 3-year-old Mary was at home and Deana was on the way.

by Esther Krahn

Learning to Decide

Suddenly as a young widow I had to face it: I was not very good at decision-making. I was too much like my mother in this area. Growing up as a young member in a large family also had not helped the situation. There was always someone older and more decisive. True, there had been situations in my past in which I instinctively knew what I wanted. I had never really doubted that I wanted a university education and that I wanted to teach. But lesser decisions gave me problems. The pros and cons invariably seemed equally balanced. Often I procrastinated in small decisions. In married life I was quite comfortable allowing my husband to take the major role in decision-making, not because he demanded that role but because I preferred that arrangement.

While making funeral plans I realized how much I now bore the sole weight of decision-making. As I named the pallbearers I found myself thinking, "I'd better check this with Neil." And then the stark reality hit me. It didn't matter what he thought; he wasn't there. It was my decision!

I could not expect much emotional support from my children either. My 12-year-old daughter was severely physically and mentally handicapped as a result of an accident nine years earlier. I also knew intuitively that my 9-year-old son had to be shielded from the responsibility that goes with making adult decisions. People would say to him, "You're the man of the house now." But I knew that he needed more than anything to enjoy his childhood.

Looking back over the last eight years, I believe I have matured in the whole area of decision-making. Let me share a few brief insights.

First, keeping a balanced perspective on decisions is important. We need to ask if a decision deserves major or minor emotional energy. Although major decisions deserve more time and energy, sometimes a multitude of minor decisions can be as overwhelming as one or two major ones.

• For Further Reading

• Davidson, Glen. *Understanding Mourning*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House. 1984. A helpful guidebook, written from a faith perspective, on what to expect throughout a period of mourning, with suggestions on how to cope with the depression and disorganization.

• Kopp, Ruth and Stephen Sorensen. *When Someone You*

Love Is Dying. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan. 1985. Drawing from her experiences as a physician and specialist in cancer treatment, Kopp offers suggestions for coping with the crisis of having a terminally ill family member.

• Krumroy, Jeri. *Grief Is Not Forever*. Elgin, Ill.: Brethren Press. 1985. The writer explores the period in her life from the time her husband is diagnosed with multiple myeloma, through

several years of therapy and remissions and crises to his ultimate death—plus her path back to usefulness and life.

• Vanauken, Sheldon. *A Severe Mercy*. New York: Bantam Books. 1977. A touching novel that is highly recommended by this issue's compiler. "Once into it, it's likely you'll weep as you read. It's very healing, very elegant and powerful," Irene Loewen says. It also contains

18 previously unpublished letters of C.S. Lewis.

• Wiebe, Katie Funk. *Alone: A Widow's Search for Joy*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. 1976. A story of how Katie Funk Wiebe found strength to survive her loneliness and loss of identity, moving beyond widowhood into a new life, a new profession, and a new assurance that God wanted her to make a contribution to life.

Also, we need to remember we are responsible for our decisions. Friends and family are often happy to give advice. However, they will feel free to advise only if they know they will not be held responsible later. The responsibility of a final decision must rest on you.

Since money is often a factor in decision-making, it is important to assess one's financial situation carefully and then face financial decisions realistically.

One underlying realization is that decisions are part of everyday living rather than interruptions of life. Life moves forward through decisions. Learning to enjoy life in the midst of decision-making is an art.

Good decision-making can boost our confidence and point out our strengths. We should not be afraid to make mistakes. "Wrong" choices can be as valuable as "right" ones, for we can learn from them.

Finally, God desires our requests for guidance. When the clear "yeses" and "nos" don't come to our questions, we sometimes begin to wonder whether God really cares about our decisions. We would rather that God said, "Do this" or, "Do that" and thus free us from responsibility. God does not delight in our confusion and hesitancy, but I believe God does want us to recognize the important issue—that we live life with integrity and trust. Sometimes God guides specifically, sometimes God asks us to proceed on our own in trust, and sometimes we need to depend on people whom God has placed in our life. ■

Esther Krahn lives in Brandon, Manitoba and attends Richmond Park Mennonite Brethren Church. She was married for 14 years and has been widowed for eight years.

by Katie Funk Wiebe



Twenty-five Years Later

Sitting across from me in the restaurant, she fixed her gray-blue eyes steadily on me and asked, "When did you get your life in order?" She had been widowed recently and found the new life a trackless sea.

I chuckled. Yes, indeed, when? Does one ever?

I recalled our family's arrival in hot Kansas 25 years ago in the middle of September. The days were fiercely warm and the nights suddenly cool. Yet I soon dismissed weather concerns before the more pressing issue of my husband's health. In seven weeks, my husband died and I was a widow with four young children, far from relatives and former friends, with little education and little money.

In the years since then I have met many women wearing the same unwanted "widow" label and facing the same question I faced then: What does it mean today to be a widow, a much-mentioned role in the Bible?

Some aspects of widowhood have changed in the last 25 years. The subjects of death and dying, widowhood, one-parent families and singleness have opened up. New widows can choose from an abundance of reading material on the subject today, unlike the situation when my husband died.

Customs related to widowhood have also changed. I recall my sister bringing me a black dress and hat to wear to my husband's funeral to satisfy social conventions. While today's widows are not expected to live out their unwelcome role wearing dark colors and subdued styles, or even to carry on under their deceased husband's name, other aspects of widowhood have not changed as much.

I recall conversations and correspondence I have had with widows from many parts of the country in these years: Little notes. Long letters. Phone calls. Coffee talks. What has not changed is that few people understand what widowhood entails until they experience it.

A middle-aged woman, only two years into the struggle, speaks of her confusion and hurt in finding that the church

"The best life insurance a husband can take out today is making sure his wife has two educations: one that enables her to earn a living and a second that gives her practice in skills needed for practical aspects of life."



"Worthwhileness is not determined by marital status. Sometimes a crisis is needed to bring this into focus."

hour is still one of the loneliest events of her week. She and others ask why former friends and relatives who come in pairs continue their round of social activities and suddenly exclude her, unmindful that she would like to remain part of that circle. She is still troubled that friends won't visit her unless she invites two couples (so the man will have someone to talk to), or why women invite her only when their husbands are absent. In many instances, widowhood means a change of friends.

While most congregations have grown more sensitive about not labeling Sunday school classes as "couples' classes" or holding "sweetheart banquets" and "husband's nights," a group of widows I spoke with agree that finding their way back into the life of a congregation alone is almost a greater hurdle than working through their grief.

I am convinced that aging, poverty and widowhood will always be women's agenda. More older widows than widowers populate homes for the elderly and make up a large proportion of many church membership roles. While most congregations do not have official roles or lists of widows who get assistance, as Paul advocated to Timothy, these older women point to another change in recent years: For some widows the financial situation is easier, but only for some.

Women widowed years ago tell stories of incredible struggles to support their families: scrubbing clothes on a washboard, doing janitor work, sewing, truck gardening—anything to keep a few dollars coming into the family treasury. Social security, more work opportunities and better education ease the financial load somewhat.

Not all widows today are at the bottom of the economic ladder to be listed with strangers, servants and slaves, as they were in biblical times. Then, many of them would have died if not taken care of by generous men. The best life insurance a husband can take out today is making sure his wife has two educations: one that enables her to earn a living and a second that gives her practice in skills needed for practical aspects of life.

What also has not changed in 25 years is that widowhood (or widowerhood) represents one of life's great opportunities for growth. The new state, in which some feel like a tree with roots severed and branches lopped off, challenges the person to work toward a new and clearer sense of self-worth before God. Worthwhileness is not determined by marital status. Sometimes a crisis is needed to bring this into focus.

The new societal role forces adjustment to a new social environment. Gone are the familiar roles in which one functioned as part of a couple. Unfortunately, gone too are some former friends who now find the new spouseless person a problem. Yes, loss of a mate is a challenge to learn new resources of faith, fellowship and friendship. It is a challenge to be unafraid of acquiring new skills, sometimes in a vocation, more often in decision-making or in new types of service.

What also has not changed over the years are the number of widows who, though still aware of the hurt and subdued by experience, are more than merely surviving. They emerge as stronger persons emotionally and spiritually. They can say freely, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do" about those who disregard or slight them. They admit widowhood for men or women is not an unending state. It lasts for a time, until the grief has been worked through and adjustments been made. Then another life begins. The legal status of widow may always apply, but the inner being has moved beyond it. As in Elijah's situation, when the brook dries up, one has to move on. Part of the healing process is being able to turn one's eyes once again to others and to recognize that everyone has a gift to offer the Lord.

Getting my life in order remains a continual process. Twenty-five years represents a lot of living with many low moments, but also many high ones. God has been gracious. ■

Katie Funk Wiebe, associate professor of English at Tabor College, is the author of *Alone: A Widow's Search for Joy*, which is being reprinted by Kindred Press, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

• Women Worldwide

• Mobile Creches, known for its pioneering work in aiding India's poorest working women, operates day care centers at construction sites where Indian women work as day laborers. The organization was founded in 1969 by Meera Mahadevan, a homemaker and writer, after she saw construction workers' children playing in the mud at a New Delhi building site.

• In Taiwan, about 300 people, including church representatives, marched in the red-light district of Taipei to protest prostitution. The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan reports the march was the "first large public demonstration against prostitution" there.

• MCC and a Catholic organization are helping El Salvadoran farmers solve social and economic

problems by working with cooperatives on Guazapa Mountain. Among its work, the cooperatives are stressing equality between husband and wife in the home, as well as the need for both partners to share in the tasks of child rearing and homemaking. The co-ops work at changing societal male superiority prejudices prevalent in Latin American society.

• In San Juan, Puerto Rico, there's only one shelter for battered women, but hundreds of women find it each year. The shelter was established in 1982 with money from the Lutheran Church in America. Casa Protegida Julia De Burgos—named after a Puerto Rican poet who was an abused woman—regularly houses 13 or 14 women and their children.

The widows who told us their stories have many valuable insights to share, some of which Report has compiled here. We hope that what they have to say will be helpful not only to other widows but also to all readers who want to respond sensitively to bereaved friends.

Lessons Learned

Loneliness strikes quickly and deeply upon losing a spouse, and adjusting to life without a close companion can take years. Frieda Freyenberger of Wayland, Iowa spoke of the tears she blinked back at mealtimes and bedtimes, even when her home was still full of growing children. Marie Bornn of Virgil, Ontario, widowed for 14 years, admitted that, "Saturday evenings are still a sore spot. Everyone knows that's couples' night."

"The loneliness is most acute in crowds and in shopping centers when I see couples walking hand in hand," Marie said. "I still dread attending weddings by myself. Especially at the meal, my eyes dart from one place to another. To whom do I attach myself? Tables are usually set for couples, and there is that vacant chair beside me. Often I have the urge to leave and retreat to my quiet, little house."

Seventy-four-year-old Helen Barg of Winnipeg also felt the desire to retreat when her husband died 18 years ago. "At first I just wanted to stay home," she said. "I had to force myself to be sociable, but I knew I would soon be left out of activities if I didn't join in."

Although difficult, going out and being sociable is essential, many women agreed. Miriam L. Weaver of Harrisonburg, Va., widowed as a young wife 37 years ago, wrote, "I still go many places alone because it is impractical to depend upon other people all the time. It is more important for me to go to programs and concerts than to worry about whether I am alone or, worse yet, to stay home."

Some widows found it irksome to move—or to be expected to move—in all-female circles. Most prefer to be invited to gatherings at which both couples and singles are present, rather than to "widow's night" socials. As Marie Bornn put it: "Our lives are already so lopsided, and we appreciate the interaction with whole families."

"I needed to talk to men, not just to women," Helen Barg wrote. "So I would invite a variety of people for meals—single men and women, also a couple or two. Sometimes I'd visit an older widower. We had been good friends before our mates died, so we thought why shouldn't we visit and stay friends?"

In addition to keeping up social contacts, widows found other ways to deal with the void in their lives. While busyness can be a way to avoid dealing with pain, some women discovered that activity was healthy. "Widows are often advised not to make changes too quickly," Marie Bornn said. "However, I knew the house we had lived in was too large for me to keep up. I sold it and purchased a bungalow. My days were filled with choosing wallpaper, painting, landscaping and even removing some walls. I often wonder how I would have coped if I hadn't had that outlet for my energy and creativity."



- Women in the Larger Church
- Margaret Jarman is the new president of the Baptist Union of Great Britain. She is the first ordained woman to hold the post.
- Accommodations have been made for male pastors who oppose working with female pastors under new guidelines issued by the pastors' union of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, which is expected to ordain female pastors next year. The guidelines also allow ordination candidates who do not wish to be ordained with persons of the opposite sex to request special arrangements.
- Last December, the board of the Norwegian Lutheran Inner Mission Society, a major independent agency within the Lutheran Church of Norway, voted to end the society's official objection to women's ordination. When several high-level officials resigned over the decision, however, the board reconsidered and, by a 12-3 majority, declared women's ordination "against the word of God." The society's vice chairman observed that it was not worth splitting the organization on the issue.
- The Association of Theologically Trained Women of India is recommending a 10-year policy plan to help assure "full, effective participation of theologically qualified women in the total life of the church," especially in terms of recruitment, endorsement and funding. The organization counts more than 300 theologically trained Christian women in India.

Some women, like Helen Barg, found that taking in boarders was a practical and beneficial arrangement. "When all my family moved out and I was left alone in the large farmhouse, I didn't enjoy it," she related. "I felt the Lord gave me the opportunity to provide room and board for several young men over the next few years. I didn't charge them much and in exchange they helped with the yard work and with other things I couldn't do. We made an agreement to talk things over if we had problems with one another. It worked fine, and I had very happy times with them. It made me feel safer that someone else was in the house, especially at night."

Helen has since coped with many further changes by treating them as adventures. She has made happy adjustments from the farm to small town and more recently, to the city. "If someone had told me 10 years ago that I would someday live in the city I would have told them that's the last place I'd go." She hardly knew how to use an elevator when she first arrived in Winnipeg but now is happily settled into an apartment building, where she has found friendly neighbors to drop in on "if the evening is long." She has even helped organize activities: "Some of us tenants asked the owner of the block for a room where we can gather. We enjoy Bible studies, potluck suppers, exercise and craft classes and social evenings."

Other widows have found similar ways to reach out and minister to other lonely persons. Marie Bornn has hosted widows for several days or even weeks after their spouses' deaths. "They can sort themselves out, see things from a different perspective and leave refreshed and ready to carry on," she commented.

Friends can be helpful to recently bereaved individuals by understanding their loneliness and their need to talk about their husband and their situation. "I wanted to talk about my husband, and I wanted to have others talk about him with me. I wanted to show pictures of him," Marie Bornn related. "This would have been so helpful even if it brought tears. People tend to feel uncomfortable if they say something that makes you cry. Yet there is such healing in tears."

Marie cherishes a memory of a person whom she billeted at her house for a conference about two years after her husband's death. In the evening, over tea, the guest leaned back and said, "Tell me about your husband." "She listened attentively and encouraged me with questions. It was so therapeutic for me. I will always be grateful to her," she commented.

Churches can help widows feel included. One woman wrote, "My husband had been a deacon in our church and three years after his death I was elected to that position. I was the first woman deacon our congregation had. That gave me a sense of belonging and even a sense of continuing my husband's interest."

Besides loneliness, other challenges facing widows include learning how to deal with finances and with home and car maintenance.

"I didn't even know how to write a check!" exclaimed Helen Barg, who had spent most of her married life raising eight children. With her sons, she had to learn to farm and make decisions regarding purchases and sales. Her advice to other farm widows: "Don't turn your accounts completely over to your children. I know some cases in which this was done and it created a lot of unhappiness for the widow. There may be times when this is necessary because of sickness, but as long as possible taking responsibility keeps one alert and happier."

Helen also had to learn how to drive at age 56. Other women face the ongoing challenges of keeping up a home—installing storm doors and windows, fixing leaky faucets and doing other odd jobs which men tend to do. Some, like Muriel Thiessen Stackley, tackle these jobs and derive a sense of accomplishment when the door latch finally works again. Others, however, lack the ability and/or physical stamina to take on home and car maintenance. One widow suggested that churches make available—even one day a year—a pool of "handypeople" who can do the odd repair jobs around the home that a widow cannot do by herself.

Some widows will need to learn to receive such help when it is offered. As one woman wrote, "The healing process can be facilitated when the lone one is accepting of the care that is offered." Another woman expressed a similar idea when she said, "Even if it is 'more blessed to give than to receive,' the time comes when the reverse is true, too." ■

• Resources/Opportunities

• *Women at the Well* is a new devotional resource available from the Church of the Brethren Women's Caucus, Rt. 1, Box 215, Mt. Solon, Va. 22843. Containing biblical interpretations, personal reflections, worship and prayers, the book will be useful for personal and group devotions. Cost is \$7.95 plus \$1.50 shipping and handling.

• Goshen College is seeking a campus minister, to begin July 1, 1988. A doctorate in an area related to campus ministries is preferred; a masters of divinity with campus ministries experience is acceptable. Applications will be accepted until August 15. For more information, contact Norman Kauffman, Dean of Student Development, Goshen College, Goshen, Ind. 46526.

• Approximately two dozen monographs exploring various aspects of the *global women's movement* are now available from Women's International Resource Exchange, 2700 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025. The collection includes half a dozen articles in Spanish and one in French by a Haitian women's collective on Haitian women in exile. Some of the new titles are "Bound and

Gagged by the Family Code" (Algeria), "Women in Zimbabwe: Post Independence Struggles," "Latin American Women Challenge Patriarchy in Church and Society," and "IMF Destabilization: The Impact on Working Class Jamaican Women." WIRE's mail-order catalog is available upon request.

We encourage and invite letters from readers that speak to the issues raised and the perspectives presented in Report. Although we try to print all letters, some may be shortened or edited to fit available space. All letters must be signed, although writers may request to have their names withheld.

Letters

• Over the years the Women's Concerns Report has served as inspiration, resource and support for me. I generally find the reports to be quite well done. The March-April issue (No. 71 Women and Counseling) left me very disappointed. As a marriage and family therapist, and a member of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, I was disturbed by your portrayal of "a family and marriage counselor" on page 7.

The standards of the AAMFT certainly would not support your limited description of our scope or theories of practice. While I am far from a spokesperson of the AAMFT, I feel strongly that an AAMFT-certified marriage and family therapist is probably far more qualified to counsel women experiencing life problems than the *averagely* trained psychologist and psychiatrist, many of whom are not as highly trained in actual *counseling* skills as the average master's level social worker.

An individual beginning the AAMFT certification process must have at a basic entry level a master's degree in social work, counseling, psychology, ministry, family studies, etc. M.D.'s and Ph.D.'s are seldom accorded more leniency. From there a specific number of hours of direct clinical practice (2,000 hours), along with 200 hours of supervision by an AAMFT-approved supervisor is required for certification as a clinical member. Additional course work at a master's level may also be required.

One of the advantages of seeking counseling from a marriage and family therapist is that individual problems are examined in light of one's past and present experiences in the family. A family systems perspective does not fail to take into account the multiple and complex societal systems that have a lasting impact on people's lives and abilities to

function in healthy ways. Many marriage and family therapists will insist on meeting with a counselee's family members in order to effect change in the systems that very often mediate *against* healthy change in individuals. Those marriage and family therapists who do treat individuals do so from a family systems perspective, even if they see only one person from a family.

I would like to suggest that women who are seeking counseling would find excellent counselors at the many Family Therapy Institutes in the United States and Canada. They could also obtain a list of AAMFT clinical members in their geographic area by writing to: AAMFT, Suite 407, 1717 K Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006.

One last plug from my soapbox! While we women are actively searching to grow in our personal and social powers, we will do ourselves a deep disservice if we do that growing in ways that deny our roots in family. My vision and hope is that we could provide the human family a way to vitality by fearlessly exercising our unique femaleness in work and home.

—Annie Wenger-Keller, MSW, ACSW, Fort Madison, Iowa

Ed. Note: The intent of the "Choosing A Counselor" article was to describe, in very broad strokes, the general orientation of the various counseling fields rather than to advise readers as to which kind of therapist will best meet their individual needs. Counselors sensitive to women's situations and needs can be found in all these professions. What may be more important than quantity of training is an open attitude that does not box women into preconceived ideas of what they should be and do. In one statement about family and marriage counselors, the emphasis was on, "who hold traditional family patterns as the norm."

• I'm the only feminist at Plow Creek Fellowship, and not a very good advertisement there, either, because I dropped out finally of the counseling I was getting there and separated from my husband. A secular but feminist counselor at the local agency gave me real help. I want to share my story sometime soon—meanwhile please just send me *Report*. I am on welfare (I'm a student) and unable to send \$6 now, but eventually I will.

This afternoon I finally came across, at Camp Mennohaven, a copy of the March-April *Report* (No. 71 Women and Counseling) and read it through. As usual, I was fed spiritually. But the letter from R. and B. Meyer makes me *angry*. They profess a concern for *people* that would not

• **Mennonite Women Educators**

• **Mary H. Schertz**, Nashville, Tenn., has been invited to a three-year term as instructor in New Testament and Greek at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries in Elkhart, Ind. She will begin her appointment July 1, 1988, following a year as Women's Stipend Lecturer.

• **Madeleine Enns**, a General Conference volunteer serving under the China Educational Exchange, recently was selected as the "model teacher" by the Sichuan Normal University officials in Chengdu, China. A member of Charleswood Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, Enns has been teaching English, literature and linguistics at the university since 1985.

• **Margaret Martin Gehman** was given faculty emeritus status when she retired from Eastern Mennonite College and Seminary in May, where she was a professor of physical education and art for 42 years.

• **Joyce Beveridge** is teaching English-as-a-second-language to over 20 adults from 11 countries at Peace Mennonite Church in Richmond, British Columbia.

• **June Alliman Yoder**, instructor of communications at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries in Elkhart, Ind., has been granted a six-month leave in 1988 to pursue a Doctor of Ministry program in homiletics.

allow them to counsel anyone to get a divorce. In my experience, thinking such as this is legalism masquerading as concern for people and can lead to hypocrisy of the highest order. I feel that legalists are really concerned about themselves and about not losing their own exalted place in the moral hierarchy established by their notion of God's law. The main function of all they say and do is to stay on top. So they begin with themselves and call it "God's law" (and they accuse *you* of having "the gall" to say how things look to God!) and judge everyone else against that standard.

When a person in trouble runs smack into the wall of legalism, she finds even more hurt and confusion. This wall is calling itself a gate! Trained as she is, usually from infancy, to mistrust her own perceptions, she thinks, "I must be wrong, it's a gate, not a wall—well, I'll walk through!" Then she's liable to spend months and years crashing into the wall, thinking there's something wrong—with *her*!

Many women never do realize the gate is somewhere else, and fail to find their way through to freedom. But those of us who *have* will never again be fooled by legalism calling itself "love."

—*Dale Ingersoll, Tishilwa, Ill.*

• I have been receiving Women's Concerns Report for the last two or three years. I attend a congregation which is affiliated with the General Conference and my husband was raised within the Mennonite tradition. In other words, I am not a Mennonite from birth, but have become involved with it recently. I regard the denomination as one which has many strong qualities, particularly in its Anabaptist heritage. I found the "Sharing Our Stories" issue (No. 70) very disappointing. While the act of sharing stories is very empowering to women, and no doubt there are many women who can relate to these stories, I found them narrow in focus and poorly written.

Reading the articles I found myself wondering why it was that the only stories you used dealt with: (1) being married, (2) not being married, (3) having children, (4) not having children. Are these the only things that concern women in the Mennonite church? Part of women's empowering process is developing an ability to define themselves (ourselves!) apart from relationships with husbands, families, children. All I found when I looked at these stories were mirror-images: women seeing themselves only as a reflection of the relationships in their lives.

The other of my concerns relating to this issue is the quality of the text. I realize that you did not solicit copy from professionals or from women who are used to writing their thoughts or the details of their lives in a narrative. However, I found it difficult to "stay with" the content because the form was so clumsy. If you are going to be using these stories in a wider context, I believe it would be to your benefit to "lovingly edit" the work in order to make it more readable. This does not have to be an imperialistic process, undertaken without the authors' participation, but it does need to be done.

I will look forward to upcoming issues, hoping that they will contain more stories which will be empowering, strengthening and broadening to the readership.

—*Barbara A. Connell-Bishop, Washington, D.C.*

• I am reminded to tell you once again how sincerely your publication is appreciated. The last issue was particularly poignant. (No. 70 Sharing Our Stories) It revealed to me how many women are still dominated by their man. But the more alarming thing is (1) how they complicitly accept this domination, and (2) how society and the authority of the church, in particular, contribute toward their complicity and men's hierarchy. If women deviate from proscribed patterns sanctioned by church and family and society at large, they unfortunately feel guilty. ("Damned if you do and damned if you don't!")

We need to seek what it means to be human, not solely male or female. Women are potentially in a stronger place to take on this role, but the specifics of how to move forward elude me.

—*Janet Friesen Regier, M.D., Evanston, Ill.*

• Mennonite Women Writers

• *Susan Bartel* has succeeded *Letha Froese* as editor of *Echo of the Rocky Mountain Conference of the Mennonite Church*. Susan lives and works at Rocky Mountain Mennonite Camp near Divide, Colo., where her husband, Allen, is director.

• *Di Brandt* has written *Questions I Asked My Mother*, which was published this year

by Turnstone Press. The book recounts a Mennonite woman's struggles to find a place in the world, confronting repressive voices of her patriarchal past.

• *Ruth Vogt* is the new editor of *Mennonite Mirror*, a Winnipeg monthly publication highlighting Mennonite culture, lifestyle and literature in Manitoba. For the past nine years she has been an assistant to editor Al Reimer.

• In Japan, *Mitsuko Yaguchi* was one of the translators of *Living More With Less*, which appeared last December. Mitsuko was motivated to translate the book after viewing African hardship while attending a General Council meeting of the Mennonite World Conference in Nairobi, Kenya in 1981.

• Herald Press is publishing *By Birth or By Choice: Who Can Become a Mennonite?* by *Martha Denlinger Stahl*, a teacher and writer in Lancaster, Pa. It tells the stories of a dozen people from a variety of backgrounds who joined the Mennonite church.

• The Ontario Women's Missionary and Service Commission has asked *Lorraine Roth* to write a history book about Mennonite women of Ontario.

Thanks to the nearly 200 readers who filled out the evaluation forms enclosed in the March-April issue and who sent in subscription donations. Here and in the next couple of issues we'll share some of your comments.



Reader Feedback

• What do you like about Report? What are its strengths?

• Personal experiences shared mean the most to me. We hear enough advice both from the pulpit and other Christians of the correct theological response, but not enough on how I've put my theology into practice and, yes, even failed.

• *Artwork!* You're going after the issue of the age—and getting to the heart—and *exposing* the church!

• Quality of articles and pertinence of topics is superb. The book review on *The Imposter Phenomenon* in the March-April issue really hit home with me and some of the issues I've been struggling with, both in and out of therapy. I'm always encouraged by the *Verbs*, which give evidence that Mennonite women are making inroads in many areas.

• I'm a 55-year-old grandmother and I enjoy the variety of subjects covered.

• Consistent high quality. Variety of topics. I'd like to see it keep a decided Mennonite focus and not become too much like other Christian feminist periodicals.

• Honesty. Willingness to face the hard questions.

• The fact that it *is*—Mennonite women need a forum for sharing common concerns and challenging each other and the church.

• Well-written articles, multiple points of views and good mixture of personal accounts and more "scholarly" articles. Although I have essentially left the church for a variety of reasons, I faithfully read *Report* because it keeps me in touch with the Mennonite world and I appreciate the thoughtfulness of the articles. I can't always relate to the church issues, but I do understand the struggles of being a woman raised as a Mennonite. The Report addresses global issues as well, which are always thought-provoking.

• What do you dislike about Report? What areas need improvement?

• Logo. Also, the letters take up much space and, except for the critical ones, are uninteresting.

• Keep enough white space between articles!

• Some issues tend to be resentfully bitter; they leave behind a bad taste. As whole Christian women, resentment and bitterness are best not to be an ongoing part of us. If it must be expressed, and it does need to be at times, then somehow there needs to be resolution, or confession. We must find ways to heal, grow and problem-solve.

• Some of the articles (stories) really ramble—more editing, perhaps? Regarding format, I'm not clear on difference between blurbs along the top and the News and Verbs. (*Ed. note: There is no difference. Our new format provides us with an upper gutter and we often find it's the only space available to fit in all the News and Verbs items collected.*)

• Nothing yet—I read from cover to cover!

• More men contributors?

• Stories tend toward pathos, but maybe that's where we are and need to move *from*.

• I don't dislike *Report*. I do criticize some articles/views—inevitable. Who can please everyone? E.g. your editorial on divorce. I agree with the letter from Brenda and Rich Meyer.

• Needs younger writers, aged 20-30. I seldom recognize a name from my age group.

• What are some issues you would like to see covered?

• More on how women can use their gifts while still not allowed to be "up front" in ministry. This is a *personal frustration*.

• Relating to those who disagree, disregard, put down, don't understand or feel threatened by women. How to deal with anger whether justified or not.

• Prejudice against lesbians.

- MCC Kenya worker **Annetta Miller** has written *Let's Learn Music*, a book designed to teach basic music reading in a simple, understandable fashion. Though not a textbook for learning African music, the book includes songs from Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Annetta, who is from Lancaster, Pa., has taught in the music department of Kenyatta University in Nairobi since 1979. In 1984 she edited the book, *50 Kenyan Folksongs to Sing and Play*.
- The work of Mennonite Brethren poet **Jean Janzen** is featured in a new book, *Three Mennonite Poets* (Good Books, 1986). It also spotlights the poetry of Yorifumi Yaguchi and David Walter-Toews.
- **Lois Braun**, a teacher who grew up in Manitoba, has authored *A Stone Watermelon*, a collection of short stories published in 1986 by Turnstone Press.
- **Audrey Poetker**, a Steinbach, Manitoba native, has had her first collection of poetry published by Turnstone Press. *I sing to my dead in German* reflects a young woman's need to express a variety of emotions.
- **Doreen Klassen** is the author of *Singing Mennonite: Low German Songs Among the Mennonites*, published by the University of Manitoba Press. The book explores the history of Mennonite music, describing the musical aspects of Low German songs and the social context in which they were sung.

- Choices that affect our lifestyle (value-system choices); meaning of life apart from career/activity (how my value is, as separated from what I primarily do).
- How women maintain hope/empowerment amid big social/global threats and ills.
- Child sexual abuse, especially incest, and the church's response to it. How do we prevent it? How do we reach out to those who are dealing with this in their lives or in their families? This happens often even in church families. I would like to raise awareness of this.
- Teen-age women—sharing Christian feminism with the next generation; young women who are selling out to corrupt culture; how to not die in the conservative Male Mennonite Church.
- **Alonna Gautsche** has been named director of Mennonite Developmental Disability Services, replacing Dean Preheim-Bartel. In May, Alonna received a master's degree in rehabilitation administration and services from Southern Illinois University.
- **Mary Zehr** has been appointed supervisor of the King Street Provident Bookstore in Lancaster, Pa. For the past three years, she has worked as greeting card buyer for all four Provident stores in the Lancaster area.
- As the new Deaf Ministries special projects coordinator of the Mennonite Board of Missions, **Charlotte Baker-Shenk** will develop resource materials for adult deaf people to use in Sunday schools and Bible studies and will edit *Signing* magazine. She continues to reside in Washington, D.C., where she is a consultant to the Center on Deafness at Western Maryland College.

• **Marsha Bennett** and **Sandra McLaughlin** received certificates in biblical studies from Eastern Mennonite Seminary in Harrisonburg, Va. this spring. **Janet Stutzman** received a certificate of pastoral studies. Marsha is seeking a pastoral assignment with a nondenominational fellowship. Sandra will be on an MCC assignment in Botswana this fall, working with the African Independent Churches there, and Janet has moved to Australia with her husband and two sons.

• **Mary Ann Hostetter** leads the 13-year-old Mennonite Fellowship of Syracuse, N.Y., which recently celebrated the opening of a renovated two-story house on the city's southeast side. The fellowship meets on the first floor and the second floor is home to the Syracuse Voluntary Service Unit.

• **Ana Luiza Neufeld** is the first woman pastor in the Brazilian Mennonite Church. She was licensed recently to serve with two men on the pastoral team of the Pinheirinho congregation near Curitiba. The daughter of Mennonite immigrants from Russia, Ana Luiza grew up in a German-speaking congregation in Curitiba and has been employed for the past 20 years at a Christian bookstore.

• **Mary Prinz** of Maple Avenue Mennonite Church in Waukesha, Wis. walked in the U.S.A.-U.S.S.R. Peace Walk from Leningrad to Moscow June 8-July 12. She was one of 200 Americans marching side by side with 200 Soviets. The event was a follow-up to last year's Great Peace March from Los Angeles to Washington, D.C., in which Mary also participated.

News and Verbs

- MCCer **Wanda Rohrer-Heyerly** has been involved in the opening of a school for deaf children in Recife, Brazil. Wanda, from Lancaster, Pa., says she is inspired by the students' desire to learn.
- **Evelyn Klassen** is directing a new program in Calgary, Alberta in which Christian volunteers befriend inmate spouses. W2 (Woman to Woman)—counterpart to the M2 (Man to Man) prison visitor program—will offer support to spouses and families of prison inmates. Klassen works out of the MCC Alberta office.
- **Mary Kauffmann-Kennel** received an American Bible Society national award for excellence in biblical studies. The Goshen Biblical Seminary graduate received a Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia Old Testament in Hebrew.
- **Dorothy Jean Weaver** has completed the first annual Lectureship Stipend for Women graduate students at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries in Elkhart, Ind. While on leave from Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Harrisonburg, Va., she taught one course per term and completed her doctoral dissertation on the Gospel of Matthew for Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Va.

• **MCC Committee on Women's Concerns Announcements**

- Let us know of your own and your friends' achievements and involvements. Send "News and Verbs" items to the editor!
- Planning to attend any conferences or church gatherings in the near future? Would you like to take along copies of *Report* to distribute

to interested persons? Let us know how many copies you would like and we will send them to you.

- We goofed in numbering the March-April issue! It should have been identified as *Report* No. 71.



• Illustrations in this issue were drawn by Teresa Pankratz of Chicago, Ill. Please do not reproduce without permission.

- **Stephanie Martin** has been appointed director of the Ontario Mennonite Music Camp, replacing founding director Lewis Coffman. She has served as a staff person with the camp since it began in 1984 and is organist and choir director at Bellefair United Church in Toronto, as well as director of the Toronto Mennonite Centre Children's Choir.
- As receptionist at Saskatoon's Sexual Assault Centre, **Marcia Hamm** often finds herself as the first person with whom a victim or family member speaks after an assault has taken place. The centre offers counseling services to victims of rape, incest and other sexual offenses, handling over 400 cases per year. A Voluntary Service worker, Marcia attends Peace Mennonite Church in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.
- **Mary Oyer** is the new executive director of the joint Hymnal Council of the Mennonite Church, the General Conference Mennonite Church and the Church of the Brethren. She previously served on the council as the Mennonite Church representative.

REPORT is published bimonthly by the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns. The committee, formed in 1973, believes that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committee strives to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures in which men and women can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in *REPORT* do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committee on Women's Concerns.

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- **Joetta Handrich Schlabach**, who has been working in Honduras with the MCC Central America Peace Portfolio for the past several years, has been accepted into a master's program in family economics and management at Michigan State University, starting in September.
- **Linda Schmidt** of Manheim, Pa. received the Rev. Thomas W. Rhodes award for Biblical (New Testament) Interpretation this spring at Lancaster (Pa.) Theological Seminary. Linda served as staff person for the Committee on Women's Concerns from 1982-1984.
- **Marian S. Hostetler**, Goshen, Ind. has been named new executive secretary of the Women's Missionary and Service Commission of the Mennonite Church, succeeding Barbara Reber in this 3/5-time position. Marian is chair of the board of elders of her local congregation and has served in Swaziland with MCC and in Nigeria with the Mennonite Board of Missions. Eve Bowers MacMaster of Bluffton, Ohio is the new editor of *WMSC Voice* magazine, replacing Vel Shearer.
- **Elsie Sheriff** has been appointed acting manager of Faith and Life Bookstore in Newton, Kan. by the General Conference Commission on Education. She has served as the assistant manager since 1983 and prior to that, directed the interlibrary loan program at Bethel College in North Newton.
- **Laura Quass**, MCCer in Mombin Crochu, Haiti, is experimenting with small-scale, mud-brick cisterns that would enable women to catch rain water at their homes, reducing the amount of time they devote to hauling water. Laura is from Seaford, Va.



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